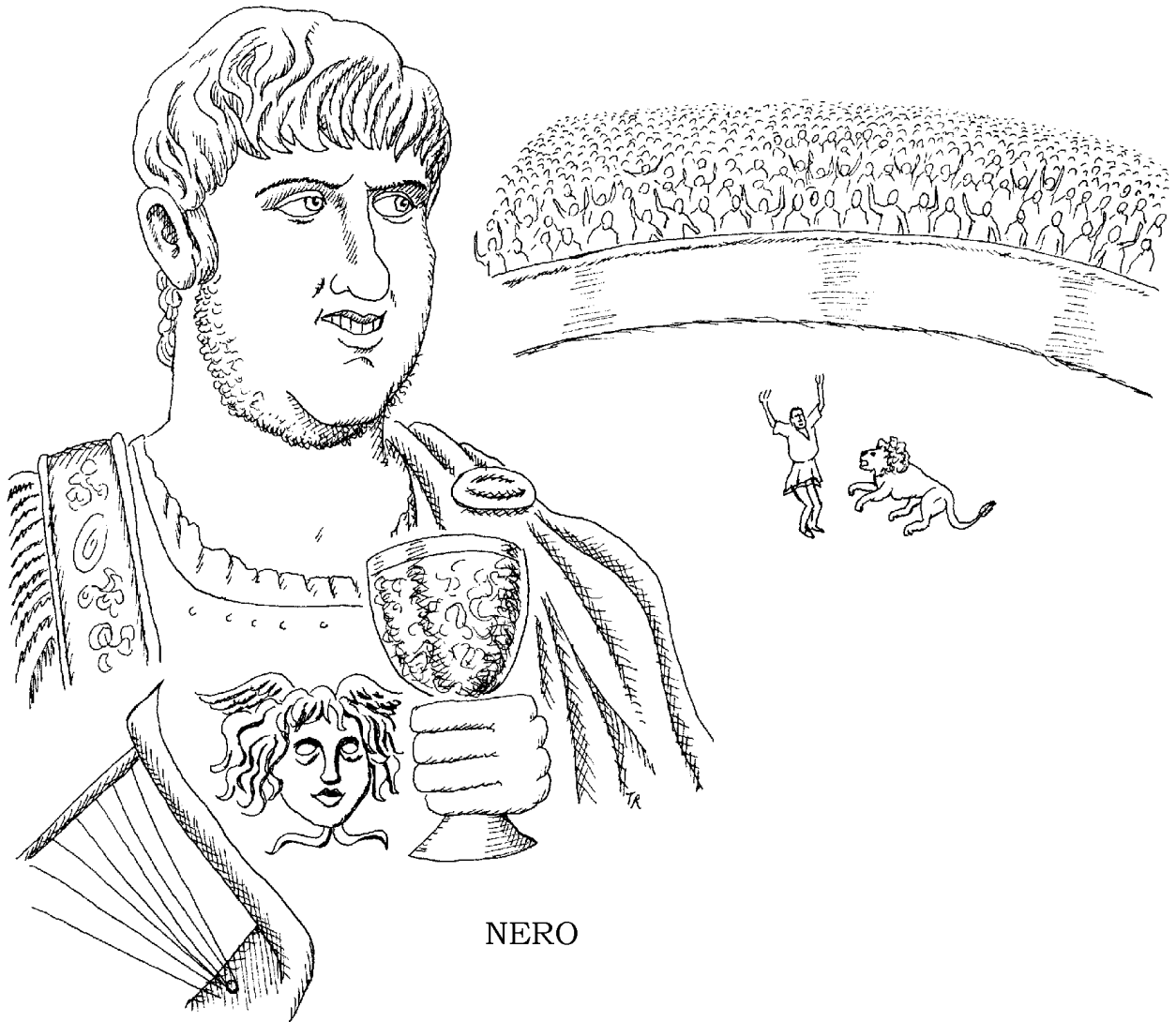


*The Christian Church  
under  
Roman Persecution*















NERO






by Pastor Terry Reese

# HISTORICAL TIMELINE OF THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH

IN THE TIME OF THE CAESARS  
(Persecuting Emperors are CAPITALIZED)

EVENTS IN THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH	THE EMPERORS OF ROME	
<p>4 BC: Jesus Christ is born.</p> <p>AD 30: Jesus is crucified by Pilate.</p>	<p>27 BC - AD 14: Augustus Caesar, Rome's first Emperor.</p> <p>AD 14-37: Tiberius is Emperor.</p> <p>Caligula (AD 37-41). Claudius (41-54).</p>	 AUGUSTUS   TIBERIUS
<p><b>THE FIRST GREAT PERSECUTION, circa AD 64-68, conducted by Nero.</b></p> <p>Peter crucified upside down, and Paul beheaded. Many others, charged with arson and with being "enemies of the human race," were thrown to wild beasts, crucified, or burned alive.</p>	<p>NERO (AD 54-68). Egotistical buffoon who murdered his own family, fancied himself a great artist, and who used public funds to enrich himself. Blamed the Christians for the great fire in Rome.</p>	 NERO
	<p>AD 68-69: The year of Civil War; Galba (68-69), Otho (AD 69), and Vitellius (AD 69) come and go.</p> <p>Vespasian (AD 69-79) restores order; destroys Jerusalem, AD 70. Did not persecute Christians.</p> <p>Titus (AD 79-81).</p>	 VESPASIAN   TITUS
<p><b>THE SECOND GREAT PERSECUTION, that of Emperor Domitian.</b></p> <p>This persecution was short, but bloody. Among the thousands of martyrs was Flavius Clemens, a cousin of the Emperor. John the Apostle was exiled to the island of Patmos, where he receives from the Lord the vision of the Apocalypse.</p>	<p>DOMITIAN (AD 81-96). A cruel tyrant who demanded to be referred to as "LORD AND GOD." Stabbed to death in AD 96.</p>	 DOMITIAN
	<p>The Period of "the Five Good Emperors," AD 96-180.</p>	

	<p>Nerva (AD 96-98), the first of "the Five Good Emperors." He relaxed his predecessor's attacks upon the church.</p>	 <p>NERVA</p>
<p><b>THE THIRD PERSECUTION, that of Trajan and Hadrian.</b></p> <p>These two Emperors persecuted the Church in moderation. Nonetheless, there were many notable martyrs, including Simeon, Bishop of Jerusalem, and Ignatius, who was thrown to wild beasts in AD 110.</p>	<p>TRAJAN (AD 98-117). One of pagan Rome's best Emperors--but he thought that the Church posed a threat to Roman culture and law, as well as to the dignity of the Emperor. He said that Christians were not to be hunted down or sought out, but if they were charged and found guilty, they were to be punished.</p> <p>HADRIAN (AD 117-138). Another of Rome's better Emperors, he more or less continued Trajan's policy.</p>	 <p>TRAJAN</p>  <p>HADRIAN</p>
<p>Polycarp, a friend and student of the Apostle John, is killed.</p>	<p>Antoninus Pius (AD 138-161), was rather more favorable in his regard for the Christians. Nonetheless, there were some martyrs, including Polycarp.</p>	 <p>ANTONINUS PIUS</p>
<p><b>THE FOURTH PERSECUTION, that of MARCUS AURELIUS.</b></p> <p>The worst since Nero. Especially brutal in southern France, "where the tortures to which many of the Christians were put, almost exceed the powers of description" (<i>Fox's Book of Martyrs</i>).</p> <p>Among the notable martyrs of this age is Justin Martyr, a Christian philosopher who defended the Faith through the use of logic and reason.</p>	<p>MARCUS AURELIUS (AD 161-180). The so-called "Philosopher Emperor." A humble man of moderation who spent most of his time reading books and writing philosophy. Despite his vast learning and usually amiable disposition, he understood little about Christians, regarding them as a cancer that needed removed.</p>	 <p>MARCUS AURELIUS</p>
	<p>Commodus (AD 180-192). A silly and worthless dandy who disgraced himself by fighting in the arena as a gladiator. He did, however, call a halt to the persecution of Christians, due to the fact that one of his mistresses was favorably disposed towards the Church.</p> <p>His assassination marks the beginning of the period of the "Barracks Emperors" (AD 192-284). These Emperors were placed upon the throne and removed by the army at will. The entire period was a military crisis. The Christian Church was the one entity that seemed to grow and prosper during these years.</p>	 <p>COMMODUS</p>

	<p>Pertinax (AD 193). Didius Julianus (AD 193) shamefully bought the throne with money.</p>	
<p><b>THE FIFTH PERSECUTION, that of Septimius Severus.</b></p> <p>Started c. AD 202. Bloody in north Africa and Egypt, but not as harsh in other parts of the Empire. Principle martyrs included Victor, Bishop of Rome, and Irenaeus, Bishop of Lyons.</p>	<p>SEPTIMIUS SEVERUS (AD 193-211). Spoke Latin with a foreign accent. First of a line of Emperors with an eastern or oriental background, as opposed to a western or Roman one.</p>	 <p>SEPTIMIUS SEVERUS</p>
	<p>Carcalla (AD 211-217). Macrinus (AD 217-18). Heliogabalus (AD 218-22), a dissipated and decadent youth, tolerated the Church. Severus Alexander (AD 222-35), a broad-minded and earnest young man, was extremely tolerant towards the Christians, even allowing them to build church buildings.</p>	 <p>SEVERUS ALEXANDER</p>
<p><b>THE SIXTH PERSECUTION, that of Maximinus Thrax.</b></p> <p>"During this persecution, raised by Maximinus, numberless Christians were slain without trial, and buried indiscriminately in heaps, sometimes fifty or sixty being cast into a pit together, without the least decency." (Fox's Book of Martyrs)</p>	<p>MAXIMINUS THRAX, or Maximinus the Thracian (AD 235-38). A crude barbarian and physical giant who attacked Christians because his predecessor (whom he murdered) had tolerated them.</p>	 <p>MAXIMINUS THRAX</p>
	<p>Gordian I &amp; Gordian II (AD 238). Pupienus (AD 238). Balbinus (AD 238). Gordian III (AD 238-244). Philippus, or Philip the Arab (AD 244-49) was so favorable to Christianity that some suspected him of secretly being a Christian himself.</p>	 <p>PHILIP THE ARAB</p>
<p><b>THE SEVENTH PERSECUTION, that of Decius.</b></p> <p>Hideous, empire-wide, and very, very bloody. People were required to obtain a certificate proving that they had honored pagan gods.</p>	<p>DECIUS (AD 249-251). An energetic man who sought to restore Rome's glory and cultural traditions, including its religion. This brought him into sharp conflict with the Church.</p>	 <p>DECIUS</p>
	<p>Gallus (AD 251-253). Aemilianus (AD 253).</p>	



### THE EIGHTH PERSECUTION, that of Emperor Valerian.

"Began under Valerian, in the month of April, 257, and continued for three years and six months, the martyrs that fell in this persecution were innumerable, and their tortures and deaths as various and painful." (*Fox's Book of Martyrs*)

VALERIAN (AD 253-260). His humiliating death at the hands of the Persians put an end to his persecution.



VALERIAN

Gallienus (AD 253-268. Claudius II (268-270).

### THE NINTH PERSECUTION, that of Aurelian.

The Emperor's ambitious religious reforms and persecution were made brief by his murder by his Praetorian Guard.

AURELIAN (AD 270-275), a militant leader who restored order to an Empire suffering a crisis of disintegration. In order to bolster unity, he encouraged all Romans to worship the Sun (Sol Invictus) and was the first Emperor to declare himself "Lord & God" in official written documents.



AURELIAN

The Church essentially enjoyed a long uninterrupted period of peace from Valerian to Diocletian. Churches were built, and the sizes of congregations increased.

As it became easier to be a Christian, many people who lacked a firm commitment to Christ were now joining the visible Church. With them, a new worldliness also entered the Church.

It became necessary for the Lord to clean house by allowing another persecution to take place—the greatest thus far—thereby separating the wheat from the chaff and thus distinguishing the genuine Christians from the false professors.

Empress Ulpia Severina (AD 275) appears to have ruled briefly following her husband Aurelian's assassination.



ULPIA  
SEVERINA

Tacitus (AD 275-276). Florian (AD 276). Probus (AD 276-282).

Carus (AD 282-283), was killed in a lightning storm.

Carinus (in the West; AD 283-284).

Numerianus (in the East; AD 283-285).

### THE TENTH PERSECUTION, THE GREAT ONE, that of Diocletian.

The worst of all of the persecutions by far; the others pale in comparison. Known as "THE TIME OF THE MARTYRS." They started by burning Bibles and churches; they ended by burning Christians. "For ten years Christians were hunted in cave and forest; they were burned, thrown to wild beasts, put to death by every torture cruelty could devise. It was a resolute, determined, systematic effort to abolish the Christian Name" (*Halley's Bible Handbook*).

DIOCLETIAN (AD 284-305) dramatically re-organized the Empire and its bureaucracy, appointing three assistant Emperors (i.e., the Tetrarchy) to help him govern. Convinced that Christianity was incompatible with the spirit of a revived Rome, he was led to the conclusion by his junior Emperor Galerius that the Church must be completely exterminated and wiped off of the face of the earth. He retired in AD 305, but the persecution continued under Galerius and his assistants.



DIOCLETIAN



GALERIUS



THE TETRARCHY

After the retirement of Diocletian and a subsequent power struggle amongst his successors, Constantine the Great (AD 306-337) emerges as undoubted Caesar. In the year AD 313, he sponsors an Edict of Toleration, declaring that Christians could freely practice their religion within the Roman Empire.

“He favored Christians in every way; filled chief offices with them; exempted Christian ministers from taxes and military service; encouraged and helped in building Churches; made Christianity the Religion of his court; issued in building Churches; made Christianity the Religion of his Court; issued a general exhortation (AD 325) to all his subjects to embrace Christianity; and because the Roman Aristocracy persisted in adhering to their pagan religions, Constantine moved his Capital to Byzantium, and called it Constantinople, “New Rome,” Capital of the New Christian Empire... He ordered, for the Churches of Constantinople, 50 Bibles, to be prepared under the direction of Eusebius, on the finest vellum by skilled artists, and he commissioned two Public Carriages for their speedy conveyance to the Emperor... He made the Christians’ day of Assembly, Sunday, a Rest Day, forbidding ordinary work, permitting Christian soldiers to attend Church services. This rest for one day a week meant much for slaves.”—*Halley’s Bible Handbook*

Eventually, Constantine himself asked to be baptized as a Christian. After Constantine, every Roman Emperor except one (Julian the Apostate) at least claimed to be a Christian—though some were undoubtedly Christian in name only.



CONSTANTINE